

It is time to end the illegal sanctions on Zimbabwe
Sibusiso Moyo, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Trade

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At the UN General Assembly (UNGA), African Leaders signalled to the West that it is high time to end the illegal sanctions that have been crippling Zimbabwe for over two decades.

The current Chairman of the African Union, South African President, Cyril Ramaphosa, led the call which was subsequently echoed and strongly endorsed by the Heads of State of Namibia, Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda and others in their respective addresses to the General Assembly.

I am immensely grateful for this support. Indeed, it could not be more timely. Our African partners understand that a better Africa equals a better world. But, the continent is facing unprecedented challenges. Coronavirus has significantly exacerbated already existing health, economic and food-security challenges on a scale not seen for more than one hundred years. Sadly, for African nations, coronavirus is just one additional burden to be borne: on top of devastating droughts, locust infestations of biblical magnitude and relentless floods.

The West often expects so much from our nations, and world leaders often analyse us through the lens of their own success. But, in doing so they are only adding to the suffering of millions of Africans.

When President Emmerson Mnangagwa won the election in 2018, he pledged to bring about change, to forge a new relationship with the citizens of Zimbabwe and with the nations of the world.

In the face of endless criticism, we have made and we continue to make significant progress. Most recently, we achieved closure on the long-outstanding issue of compensation to farmers whose land was acquired during the Land Reform Programme of the late 90's and early 00's. The sum of US\$ 3,5 billion, for improvements effected to the land prior to its acquisition, was agreed-upon by way of negotiations between government and the farmers.

Elsewhere, we repealed two antiquated laws (AIPPA and POSA). We passed a new Freedom of Information Act, and draft legislation to address the Constitutional requirement for an Independent Complaints Mechanism will shortly be tabled before Parliament. Other constitutional amendments designed to further modernise and open up government are already before Parliament.

The reformed Zimbabwe Anti-Corruption Commission has received global plaudits, with some notable and important arrests, including two sitting cabinet ministers. The "audit of the rich", currently being undertaken, is expected to yield further fruits of transparency and accountability.

We have also initiated the most ambitious set of privatisations in the history of Zimbabwe, with 43 of Zimbabwe's 107 state-owned enterprises earmarked for reform.

We know these reforms are essential if we are to show the world that we are changing our nation's trajectory. We want to be more open, to grow our economy, to strengthen our public services, to improve the lives of our citizens and we want to play a positive part in the globalised world.

We acknowledge that we still have a long way to go but we are resolute in our determination to modernise Zimbabwe. Even in the midst of the shattering economic impact of COVID-19, we are committed to the path of reform.

I believe the new Zimbabwe has shown sincerity in its willingness to compromise with the West. However, rather than less criticism and an easing of sanctions, we have in fact faced more pressure from the United States. Those who believe these so-called 'targeted' measures only hurt the rich and powerful, are profoundly mistaken. The UN recognises that economic sanctions have worsened existing inequalities. They have crippled our banking sector and have negatively impacted upon the performance of businesses both large and small. Our exclusion from lucrative trade benefits afforded under the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), in particular, is holding back our entrepreneurial potential.

Sanctions, and the enhanced country-risk factor they generate, have also made it close to impossible to attract meaningful foreign investors from the West. And a lack of foreign exchange continues to impinge on the very basics of economic life, from raw materials to life-saving drugs.

Our request to the West is very simple: end these sanctions, allow us to respond more comprehensively to the coronavirus pandemic and support us on our journey towards a new Zimbabwe. The desire to squeeze us into a corner serves only to maintain unjustified isolation from the West, to foster negative sentiment towards those who punish us and, most importantly, to perpetuate the suffering and privation endured by our already hard-pressed people.

A better Zimbabwe results in a better Africa and a better world.

It is time to end the illegal sanctions on Zimbabwe.

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